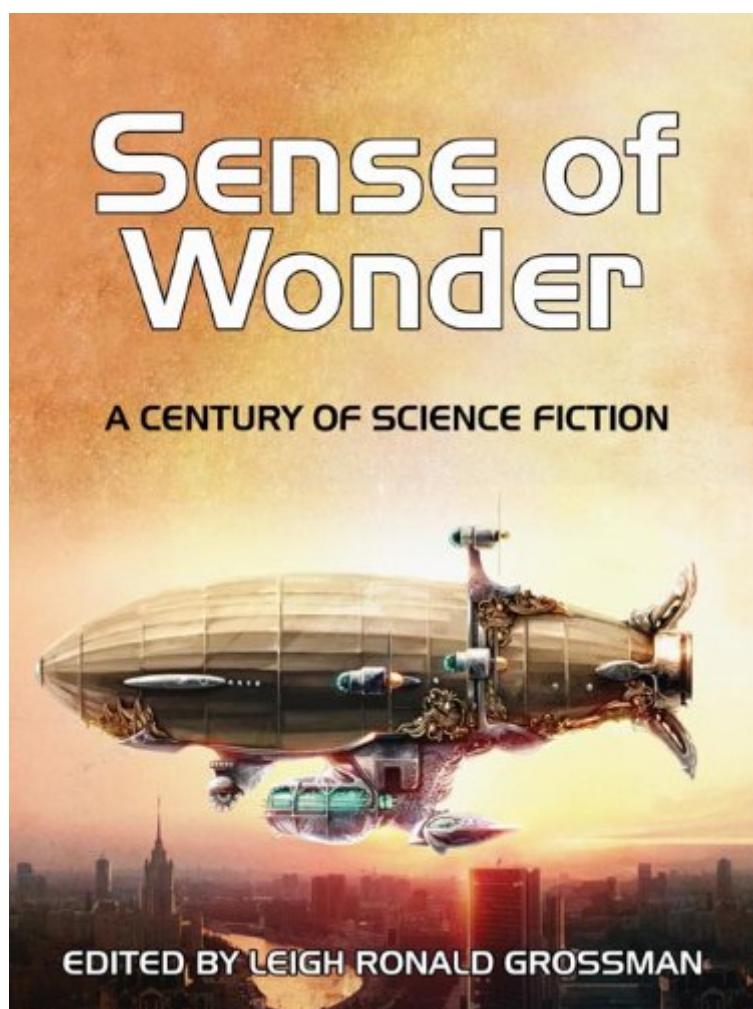


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Sense Of Wonder: A Century Of Science Fiction



Synopsis

A survey of the last 100 years of science fiction, with representative stories and illuminating essays by the top writers, poets, and scholars, from Edgar Rice Burroughs and Samuel Butler to Robert A. Heinlein and and Jack Vance, from E.E. "Doc" Smith and Clifford D. Simak to Ted Chiang and Charles Stross-- and everyone in between. More than one million words of classic fiction and essays!

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Customer Reviews

Leigh Ronald Grossman taught college-level science fiction courses for many years. He faced the recurring challenge of selecting fiction and nonfiction reading material each year. Grossman finally decided to assemble his own collection with stories and essays ordered to trace the historical development of the field. This book is the result: it is just under a thousand pages of excellent reading. The book does not claim complete coverage, like that attempted by John Clute's The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction. Instead it samples, including stories representing different historical periods, important authors, and selected science fiction subgenres and related topics. The

book is noteworthy for its treatment of early science fiction, including stories by Edgar Allan Poe, Mary Shelly, Jules Verne, and others who wrote before the genre had a name. I read through 10% of the book before the stories began to look like my conception of science fiction. This historical perspective was enlightening. The editor includes many classic stories. My favorites, with painfully brief descriptions, are:--"Who Goes There?" by John Campbell is the original alien-goes-bump-in-the-night story.--"Arena" by Fredric Brown pits a human against an alien in hand-to-tentacle combat.--"Grotto of the Dancing Deer" by Clifford Simak introduces a very old man.--"The Cold Equations" by Tom Godwin is a cautionary tale for stowaways.--"The Little Black Bag" by C. M. Kornbluth traces a lost doctor bag from the future.--"First Contact" by Murray Leinster faces the challenges of meeting friendly aliens.--"Think Like a Dinosaur" by James Patrick Kelly proves we can think in new patterns. Some stories show the range of emotions science fiction can evoke. They introduce readers to the different tones and textures of well-written science fiction. Five examples:--"The Country of the Kind" by Damon Knight shows how hard it is for a sociopath to empathize.--"Her Smoke Rose Up Forever" by James Tiptree, Jr. is about the immortality of pain.--"Bicycle Repairman" by Bruce Sterling introduces the fast-paced complexity of cyberpunk.--"A Letter From the Clearys" by Connie Willis draws forth a future nostalgia for things past.--"Bears Discover Fire" by Terry Bisson takes a whimsical view of increasing intelligence. Nonfiction articles and author profiles are placed at chronologically appropriate intervals among the stories. There is good coverage of many areas, including my favorites: Space opera, first contact, post-apocalyptic societies, and time travel. Articles about early science fiction editors Hugo Gernsback and John Campbell describe their relationships with their writers and the tremendous impact they had on the field's development. The authors' bios are well-written, including a sample of their short stories and longer works and occasional oddities from their personal lives. (Such as the author whose aunt was his mother's identical twin--and frequently masqueraded as his mother.) There is even some advice for would-be science fiction writers, such as Terry Bisson's "Sixty Rules for Short SF." This is a great collection! Serious fans should read it thoroughly, taking time to track down the additional stories, novels and authors it recommends. Those not ready for such a commitment can place it on their shelves and read from it occasionally and selectively. Readers who enjoy nonfiction may want to pick up *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction* or *Science Fiction: A Very Short Introduction*. They can continue tracking leading science fiction stories each year in Gardner Dozois's *The Year's Best Science Fiction* or David Hartwell's *Year's Best SF* annual collections.

Full disclosure: I'm a professor who has taught science fiction courses (both survey and specialized). The upside: This is a great comprehensive text for a number of different courses on science fiction or just a great book to work through for someone who wants to become better acquainted with the older stuff. I'd read most of this work but it is instructive to see it arranged by time and topic with some contextualizing essays. The editor deserves credit for taking on such an enormous task and doing so well. It starts with Burroughs' "A Princess of Mars" and Capek's "RUR" then proceeds through the major eras and themes of twentieth century science fiction. Mixed in are some very well-written essays on those themes: religion in science fiction, women in science fiction, fandom and conventions, post-apocalyptic fiction, science fiction in the UK, et al. In other words it goes to great efforts to help put the stories in context and help the reader understand why certain topics and formats became trends. There are also a number of appendices on writing science fiction and the current market. The downside: in order to fit all this in, the book is on thin "bible paper" and in a small font. If they hadn't done this then it would have to be at least a three-volume set (and thus too expensive for a single purchase). Of course you don't have to worry about that with the Kindle edition. The only other thing is there is no representation of cyberpunk, which just might be a reflection of the editor's preferences. (If not, then the omission really should have been mentioned and explained.) Whether or not you consider cyberpunk major literary sub genre it certainly was influential in how people perceive the future. Overall: this is a great book. It would work well for almost any approach to a science fiction course (historical, themed, format, etc.) and is much more cost effective than trying to assemble hundreds of stories by separate purchases or photocopies. It's also a great gift since there is so much to explore inside. I'd recommend it for anyone who has an interest in science fiction.

A wonderful compilation. You should definitely buy it as an e-book if you can though, the print is incredibly small in print and it's very hefty, making the physical version the worst to buy if you're getting it for a class.

I bought the kindle edition after I saw my classmate's book and realized the font was extremely small. The book has a good collection of stories, but you will only be able to read it if you buy the kindle version.

Awesome compilation of sci-fi short stories. Exceeded my expectations!

Not only does it contain many of the classics, it has some amazing history and commentary alongside them. I have the Kindle edition (adjustable font size ;)). Well worth the price IMO.

Excellent collection, ideal for use as a text for a science fiction course, though the typeface is quite small and I recommend the Kindle version.

The stories themselves are phenomenal, but the format of the book is absolutely horrible. If you buy the gigantic book, the text is in hyper-fine print over hundreds and hundreds of pages. If you buy the Kindle version, which is not included with the book, you have to navigate tedious menus and read stories a few paragraphs at a time.

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